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Secretariat

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Information circular*

To: Members of the staff

From: The Under-Secretary-General for Management

Subject: **Potential problems associated with the transition to the year 2000**

1. Most of you must have by now become aware of issues arising from the year 2000 (Y2K) date conversion problem of computers, or "millennium bug". Indeed, on 1 January 2000 some computers may be unable to process date information correctly, causing unpredictable results, including systems malfunctions. Since business processes in the United Nations interact with external systems, Y2K-induced potential failures may affect not only the internal business systems of the Organization — over which we exercise control — but also other essential external services on which we depend. Thus, failures in such areas as telecommunications, banking, utilities, security, transport and supplies may disrupt or delay critical elements of the work of the Organization.

2. Like many Governments and businesses around the world, the Organization, therefore, is addressing potential problems associated with the Y2K phenomenon. While much has been done during 1998 to minimize the impact of Y2K, particularly in terms of infrastructure and equipment, work still needs to be completed in validating, testing and preparing contingency plans for all critical activities that must continue to operate even if technology fails. The Y2K problem is in fact a complex business problem that will affect all aspects of the Organization's operation.

3. With less than 200 working days until the turn of the millennium, it is now recognized that not all Y2K problems will be identified and remedied before the deadline. Priority is therefore given to mission-critical operations of the Organization to ensure that they can be operational after 1 January 2000 irrespective of outside constraints.

4. Naturally, it is programme managers who continue to have the responsibility for the planning and effort necessary to ensure that their operations will not be compromised by or otherwise can adequately respond to problems associated with the Y2K problem.

5. In the meantime, while we are upgrading or replacing our non-compliant business applications and hardware and testing them, as part of our overall contingency planning we are also thinking of some common sense measures that will alleviate the burden of potential

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problems. These include the recommendation to programme managers to avoid, as far as possible, scheduling meetings and conferences during the first two weeks of January 2000. Staff members who are performing essential management, safety and security tasks or are key in running critical business applications, as well as those involved with the implementation of contingency plans in various offices and departments may be asked by their supervisors to work or to be reachable and ready to come to work during the roll-over period.

6. Over the next months and weeks, there will be a series of advisories and administrative notes dealing with the Organization's preparedness and addressing matters of concern to programme managers and the staff. The first of such advisories, a travel advisory prepared by the Office of the United Nations Security Coordinator, is contained in annex I; some common sense advice on individual preparedness is contained in annex II.

Annex I

Travel advisory

(Circulated on 15 March 1999 by the United Nations Security Coordinator to all designated officials, security focal points and executive offices)

On 1 January 2000, some computer-based systems throughout the world may be unable to process information correctly, causing unpredictable results, including system malfunctions. The United Nations, many Governments and businesses are actively involved in addressing potential problems associated with the year 2000 (Y2K) phenomenon. Those who are taking corrective action will probably experience little or no disruption. However, others who have more limited resources or expertise, or who are not giving the problem sufficient attention, may experience significant difficulties. In countries that are not prepared, the Y2K problem could affect financial services, utilities, telecommunications, transportation and other essential services. It is difficult to forecast where the Y2K problem will surface. It is possible that some problems may even appear before 1 January 2000. Of particular concern are:

- Some transportation systems worldwide could be affected by computer problems. Although most of the major airlines are expected to be Y2K-compliant, United Nations staff travelling over the New Year holiday should be aware of the potential for disruption of transportation services and take that into account in making their overall travel arrangements.
- Financial institutions may experience difficulties. United Nations staff should not assume that credit cards, ATM machines international banking transactions etc. will operate normally at all locations throughout the world.

United Nations staff who have special medical requirements should not assume that all medical facilities and services will be available. Electrical, water and sanitation systems involving computers may experience malfunctions from the Y2K problem.

All United Nations staff who are planning to travel in late 1999 and early 2000 should be aware of the potential for problems and stay informed about Y2K preparedness in the location(s) to which they will be travelling. Staff members should ensure that if there is a security phase in effect at the location they are travelling to, appropriate clearance is sought and received from the designated official prior to their departure. In locations where no security phase is in effect, staff members may wish, nonetheless, to let the local designated official know of their presence at the duty station.

Staff members should be aware that, should Y2K-related problems occur at a particular duty station, the United Nations security management system may be hard pressed to provide assistance. Staff members must remember that they bear primary responsibility for their own security while travelling on vacation.

Additional information may be obtained from the Office of the United Nations Security Coordinator or from your organization's security focal point.

Annex 2

Individual preparedness

Individually, what can you do to be prepared, you and your family? That depends of course on the duty station at which you serve. Experts generally recognize that planning for Y2K in many ways resembles planning for a known disaster like a storm of any kind. So, while this list is by no way exhaustive, it is recommended that:

- You should have supplies to last several days to a week for yourself and those that live with you. This includes having non-perishable food, water, prescription and non-prescription medications that you regularly use.
- It may also be wise to have some extra cash on hand, in case electronic transactions involving ATM cards, credit cards, and the like cannot be processed.
- If you live in the Northern Hemisphere, have also extra blankets, coats, hats and gloves to keep warm. You may also think of acquiring alternative heating devices.
- Have plenty of flashlights and extra batteries.
- If you plan to use a portable generator, make sure that you have enough fuel to run it and only connect what you want to power directly to the generator; but under no circumstances should you connect the generator to your home's electrical system.
- You may also consider having your car serviced prior to the end of 1999 and ensure that you keep it filled with fuel at all times after mid-December 1999.